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ABSTRACT

The Dawn Hancock Animal Farm, which was developed in 1974 with volunteer labor and over $100,000 in donations, provides farm experiences for the mentally handicapped students of the Helen J. Stewart School in Las Vegas, Nevada. The farm and animals are part of the school's emphasis on vocational training, and every effort is made to help prepare the students for work after graduation. One of the school's major goals is to enable each student to "become as competent a worker as possible." Las Vegas, with its surrounding rural communities provides, employment opportunities for the students. The operation of the farm involves a number of chores that must be completed each day. Teacher aides and foster grandparents assist the students. The students also receive the school's services which include speech therapy, adaptive physical education, physical therapy, team sports, academic studies, and adaptive music. The farm program gives students an opportunity to develop self-help skills. Positive reinforcement is given through verbal reinforcement, paychecks, and special activities. (EM)

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THE DAWN HANCOCK ANIMAL FARM

HELEN J. STEWART SCHOOL
2375 EAST VIKING ROAD
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CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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EC 165163

FARMING EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HANDICAPS

Presenter: Mr. Ron Lee

Tillie the Goose and Missy the Pony are going to school every day this year. Actually, the two animals are only part of an expanding menagerie of farm animals permanently housed in a red and white barn built to benefit the mentally handicapped children who attend the Helen J. Stewart School.

Opened in 1974, the barn and its occupants were an immediate success. According to the school's principal, Dr. Robert Foster, who spearheaded getting the farm area as part of his school's curriculum, the kids are absolutely fascinated by the animals.

Tillie has been the hit of the farm. "The kids adore her," Foster said. Tillie, like all the other inhabitants of the Dawn Hancock Animal Farm, was donated to the school. As a matter of fact, the entire farm area has been developed with volunteer dollars and labor.

In the beginning a dealer in town, Louis Geswaldo, was so interested in getting animals available for the children to experience that he became the project chairman to get the barn built. The school's STAR Auxiliary was most helpful with fund raising as were many other local community organizations. The farm was constructed over a number of months, with

volunteers gathering together each Saturday. As of this year, over $100,000. has been raised to complete the farm area including building the barn, corrals, cover for corrals, fencing around farm, chicken house and yard, orchard area, fenced-in planting area, stor-

Dr. Robert E. Foster, Principal - Responsible for development of farm project.

age shed for hay and grain, greenhouse, storage shed for greenhouse and sprinkling system.

As entertaining as the farm and animals may be, they have a very real function at the school - with its emphasis on vocational training - for all students. One of the school's major goals is to enable each student to "become as competent a worker as possible."

Las Vegas, with its strong rural communities within a short distance of the city, provides opportunities for employment. Students can also find employment with veterinarians, animal shelters and as barn boys or girls.

Ron Lee, this year's teacher in charge of the farm program, is finding the "new experience" to be a real challenge; however, he also feels the barn could just be the beginning for his students.

Every effort is made in the farm program to create a "working" environment to help prepare the students for after graduation. The operation of the farm involves a number of daily chores that must be completed each day. These chores include feeding all animals with measured amounts of hay, craced corn, laying mash, rabbit pellets, etc; watering of all animals; raking and cleaning of all animal corrals, pens and cages; grooming the horses; picking, cleaning and packing eggs; raking general barnyard; sweeping and cleaning the barn's interior.

There exists an opportunity for each student, regardless of their handicapping condition, to pitch in and help out with the daily chores. With the assistance of a teacher aide and two foster grandparents, it is possible to have every student working on the chores at the same time.

Richard, Billy, Ron Lee -
Teacher and Mark.
-Getting chores underway-

Because of a rotation system within the farm operation, every student has the opportunity to work on all of the different chores.

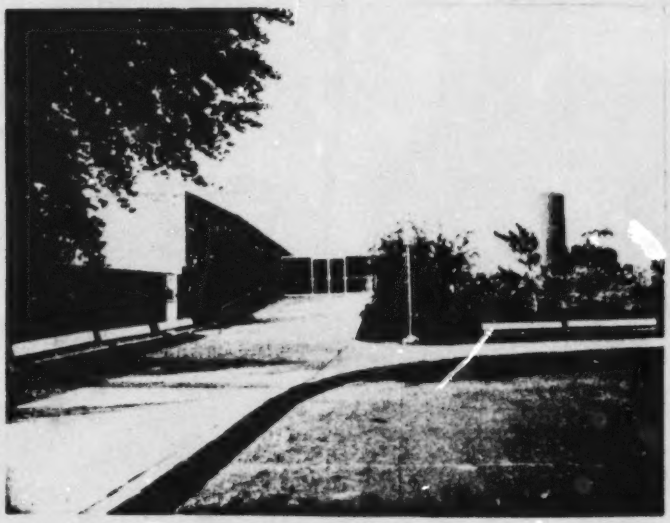
Along with this very busy schedule, the students still continue to receive all of the school's services which include speech therapy, adaptive physical education, physical therapy, team sports, academics and adaptive music.

Each and every day, after completing the daily chores, the students go into the locker rooms and take showers and put clean clothes on for the remainder of the day. This is an excellent opportunity to develop these

important self-help skills - grooming, dressing and social behavior. Students then take turns in the responsibilities of washing and drying clothes.

As this year progresses, the egg production will be expanded to the point of producing three to five dozen eggs a day. The students will develop some additional skills of taking care of the eggs through the final stage of selling them and collecting the money from the sales.

The students are continuously reinforced in a positive manner in the farm program. This is accomplished through verbal reinforcement, paychecks and special activities such as a movie or a treat and field



Helen J. Stewart School -
Main building

trips to the parks, restaurants or shopping trips.

The farm program, along with the animals, plays an extremely therapeutic role with these handicapped youngsters, especially the students that are more withdrawn. It has worked miracles!